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Service Women's Action Network Outraged by Rape and Sexual Assaults at VA Hospitals

SWAN Reacts to Government Report Showing Sex Crimes Being Committed Against Veterans

NEW YORK, NY - Today, the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) expressed its outrage over a report released by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on Tuesday that patients and staff have been raped and sexually assaulted while seeking care at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities.

284 reports of sexual assaults occurred between January 2007 and July 2010. 67 were classified as rape, 185 as inappropriate touching, 13 as forced oral sex, 8 as forceful medical examinations and 11 as other types of sexual assaults involving patients against patients, patients against staff and staff against patients.

The findings came as part of a GAO investigation of VA safety policies in five of the VA's 153 medical facilities.

"We are extremely outraged at the VA for allowing this to happen, but we are not all that surprised," said Anu Bhagwati, former Marine Corps Captain and executive director of the Service Women's Action Network. "SWAN has testified numerous times before Congress about the hostile and harassing environment that often exists at VA hospitals. We receive calls every week from veterans telling horror stories of VA visits

where they have literally run a gauntlet of sexual harassment and mistreatment. The rates of sexual assault and harassment in the military are disturbing enough. However, to expose veterans to hostile behavior where they are being treated for conditions related to in-service sexual trauma is unconscionable."

The House Committee on Veterans Affairs requested the report and has introduced H.R. 2074, a bill that would require the VA to track all sexual assaults and to closely examine veterans that may pose a risk of committing sexual assault. The committee will hold a hearing next week to examine the findings.

Bhagwati testified last spring at the House Committee on Veterans Affairs Joint Hearing with Subcommittee on Health, "Healing the Wounds: Evaluating Military Sexual Trauma Issues," about the concerns that face victims of sexual harassment and her unnerving experiences with VHA, saying: "Triggers of one's assault or harassment are everywhere, from the prospect of running into your perpetrator, to being surrounded by male patients who routinely engage in sexual harassment of female patients, to being improperly treated by staff members who have no knowledge about the unique experience of sexual trauma in a military setting. The climate at VA hospitals is still largely unwelcoming to women, but for [Military Sexual Trauma] survivors, the experience of going to an appointment can be life-threatening."

For a full transcript of the testimony, click [here](#).

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 27.8 percent of U.S. women veterans have enrolled in the VA health care system, and those who recently served in Afghanistan and Iraq are turning to VA health care at unprecedented rates. SWAN's fact sheet, "[Rape, Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the Military](#)," reports that female survivors who receive VHA health care report a lower quality of care and dissatisfaction with VHA services compared to women using alternatives - most of whom have access to private health care.

SWAN continues to advise numerous policy makers and testify before Congress on the variety of obstacles women veterans face at VA facilities.

DONATE NOW



SWAN is a 501(c)3 organization that urgently needs your financial support. Your tax deductible donation will help SWAN ensure equality, fairness, and justice for women in the military and dramatically improve resources for women veterans.

SWAN's vision is to transform military culture by securing equal opportunity and the freedom to serve in uniform without threat of harassment, discrimination, intimidation or assault. SWAN also seeks to reform veterans' services on a national

scale to guarantee equal access to quality health care, benefits and resources for women veterans and their families. You can find the Service Women's Action Network on [The Web](#), on [Twitter](#) or on [Facebook](#).



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